

What Methods Can Faculty Members Use to Post Accessible Microsoft PowerPoint Presentations to Online Distance Education Courses?

Microsoft PowerPoint has been referred to as the “killer application” for online distance education. There are five primary ways that an instructor can post a PowerPoint presentation to a distance education platform, as follows:

- ☐ Post the PowerPoint presentation “as is” in PowerPoint (PPT) format.
 - ☐ Utilize the “Save as HTML” feature built into PowerPoint.
 - ☐ Save the PowerPoint presentation as Rich Text Format (RTF) file.
 - ☐ Use a 3rd party tool to facilitate the conversion from an existing PowerPoint presentation.
 - ☐ Manually create “from scratch” a native HTML document.
- Each of these methods has pluses and minuses in terms of accessibility, usability, and ease of use.

■ PPT Format

Posting a PowerPoint presentation in “native” PPT format is the easiest way of posting a presentation. However, a student must have either PowerPoint or the PowerPoint Viewer installed to view files in this format. Because presentations using the PowerPoint Viewer are displayed in a graphical format, students with visual impairments are not able to access PPT files directly unless they have the full version of PowerPoint. Additionally, presentations stored in the native PPT file format can be quite large, taking much longer to download than presentations stored in other formats.

■ Save as HTML

PowerPoint does allow users to save their PowerPoint files as HTML files, which can be viewed by anyone across the Internet. This is a quick and easy way to put PPT files in HTML format. However, the HTML files created by PowerPoint utilize a complex frameset that can be difficult for students with visual impairments or mobility impairments to navigate. Additionally, the Save-As HTML does not allow for certain PowerPoint elements, such as graphics, video clips, animated images, or tables to be presented in an accessible format.

■ Save as RTF

PowerPoint allows the user to export the outline of the presentation into Rich Text Format (RTF). This can be done by saving the presentation as an RTF file, or copying the outline and pasting it into a word processor. RTF files are readily usable by students with disabilities, and can be viewed in Microsoft Word, Microsoft WordPad, and most other word processing documents.

However, this approach, while it results in an accessible, text-only file, does not transfer all the information from a PowerPoint file into an RTF file. The resulting RTF file would not contain any tables, graphics, charts, transitions, animations, multimedia files, or “text box” text that does not appear in the outline. Users choosing to use RTF files should compare the resulting RTF file with the PPT file to ensure that the same information appears in both files.

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Third-Party Tools

There are two tools that are available that facilitate the conversion of PowerPoint presentations to accessible HTML presentations. These tools are:

- ☐ The Microsoft Power Point WWW Publishing Accessibility Wizard (by the Division of Rehabilitation - ☐ Education Services of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign), available online at: ☐ www.rehab.uiuc.edu/ppt/index.html
- ☐ PPT2HTML (PowerPoint 2 HTML), created by RDP Slides, Cincinnati, Ohio, available at ☐ ☐ ☐ www.rdpslides.com/ppt2html

The third-party tools are possible options, however, both of them have limitations. The University of Illinois product is still under development, and users may encounter a number of runtime errors. The PPT2HTML product requires users to have a good knowledge of HTML to create the templates required by the program.

Creating a "Native" HTML File

The most difficult process for turning a PowerPoint file into an accessible format for a student with a disability is using HTML code to transfer the information in the PowerPoint into an HTML file. This requires the faculty member to have a good knowledge of HTML and website accessibility standards. However, turning out an HTML file guarantees that the PowerPoint presentation can be easily understood and accessed by students with disabilities.

While this might seem like a daunting task at first, with a little bit of guidance and practice, anyone can convert presentations to accessible HTML format quite efficiently. The process for creating an accessible HTML file from a PowerPoint presentation is covered in Factsheet 6, "Creating an Accessible HTML File from a PowerPoint Presentation."